

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6618

As Passed House, March 2, 2006

Title: An act relating to the high school assessment system.

Brief Description: Requiring a study to explore options to augment the current educational assessment system.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators McAuliffe and Schmidt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 1/19/06, 1/30/06 [DPS-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/6/06, 2/7/06 [DPS(EKHE)].

Passed Senate: 2/10/06, 47-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6618 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Higher Education; Weinstein, Vice Chair, Early Learning & K-12; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Benton, Berkey, Carrell, Delvin, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Pflug, Rasmussen, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Shin.

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6618 as recommended by Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Doumit, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Fairley, Kohl-Welles, Pflug, Pridemore, Rasmussen, Regala, Roach, Rockefeller and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Bryon Moore (786-7726)

Background: Beginning with the graduating class of 2008, public school students must meet the state standard on the 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement and graduate from high school, except for eligible special education students for whom the WASL is not appropriate. Beginning in 2006, retakes of the WASL are available up to four times in the content areas in which the student did not meet the state standard.

The Legislature has directed the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to develop objective alternative assessments, which could include an appeals process, for students to demonstrate achievement of the state standards. The alternatives must be comparable in rigor to the skills and knowledge on the WASL. The Legislature must formally approve the use of any alternative assessment. Students must retake the WASL at least once prior to accessing any alternative assessment.

Summary of Bill: This act is named for former Governor Booth Gardner. The intent section provides that the Legislature continues to support the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) as part of a comprehensive assessment system. However, there is interest in exploring why some students have not been able to meet the state standards and whether additional alternative methods, options, procedures, or performance measures could be used to augment the current system and enhance the success of students.

The Washington Institute of Public Policy (Institute) is directed to conduct a study that will consist of three components:

- 1) An statistical analysis of the characteristics of the students who did not meet the state standard on the WASL and identification of possible barriers to student success or possible causes of the lack of success;
- 2) A review and identification of additional alternative assessment options that will augment the current assessment system. When identifying alternative assessment options, the Institute will include a review of alternative assessments in other states and those developed and those proposed in Washington. For each option, the study must consider costs, cultural appropriateness, whether it reliably measures a student's ability to meet state learning standards, whether it meets the current requirement of rigor and objectivity, and any challenges to implementation, including any legislative action necessary for implementation; and
- 3) A review and identification of additional alternative methods, procedures, or combinations of performance measures to assess whether students have met the state learning standards. For each option, the study must consider the same issues addressed for the alternatives assessments plus whether the procedures, methods, or performance measures could be standardized across the state.

By December 1, 2006, the Institute must provide an interim report to the Legislature and a final report by December 2007. The interim report must include a preliminary statistical analysis of the student data and recommendations on at least two alternative assessment options, methods, procedures, or performance measures. The final report must include suggestions for any follow-up studies that the Legislature could undertake to continue to build on the information obtained in this study.

The Institute must consult with a number of listed experts and stakeholders in developing the initial list of possible options, procedures, methods, and measures to be reviewed under the second and third part of the study. OSPI and school districts are required to provide the Institute with access to all necessary data to conduct the study.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 17, 2006.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For (Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education): (Original Bill) This bill provides a "Heart" for schools: High Expectations and Responsible Tests for schools. It is a culmination of the work of many stakeholders. It gives the state a process to meet the high standards that the state established for students and educators. Too few kids are moving forward with a high school diploma and too many kids are dropping out. The goal is to get kids educated so that we can compete worldwide. House Bill 1209 provided that the academic assessment system would include a variety of assessment methods. We should allow students the opportunity to show their skills in different ways, other than the WASL. Each student learns differently and should be tested differently. Just one test, including the WASL, is not right for every student. There is a long history of oppression by nonIndians on our Indian students. The tests used in schools, including the WASL, are not culturally relevant for us. The options should be culturally relevant. Before using any test, we should ensure that it is not damaging to students. Many people have expressed concern about the negative impacts of the WASL on students, particularly students of color. The options should be provided without requiring students to fail the WASL first. An assessment system of options, instead of alternatives, is better because some people think of alternatives as being lesser or lower quality.

Testimony Against (Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education): (Original Bill) We strongly believe that students should be held to high standards and that educators should give students the minimum skills that they need to be successful in the future. This bill would have a negative impact on the positive changes that are occurring in our schools because of the WASL. Students, teachers, and principals are working hard and we do not want you to undermine those efforts by changing course now. In an age where you need to graduate to get a job and go to college to get a good job, there is no denying that certain skills need to be acquired. The basic reading, writing, and math standards that are tested in the WASL are the minimum skills that students need to compete in the real world no matter what the student chooses to do with his or her future. We must give students the tools for success; it is a matter of social justice. Employers need at least this solid foundation of basic skills on which to build. The Legislature has addressed the different needs of students by providing accommodations and exemptions for special education students and requiring alternative assessments to be developed. For other students, their success does not rely solely on the WASL. Students must also pass their course requirements, do their senior project, and complete their high school and beyond plan. There has been state-wide polls that show strong support for the graduation test.

Testimony Other (Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education): (Original Bill) We cannot support 6618 because it continues a high stakes test. We do support efforts to provide meaningful options to the WASL to provide a balanced and fair assessment system.

Who Testified (Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education): (Original Bill) PRO: Booth Gardner, former Washington State Governor; Mary Kenfield, PTA; Kate Enslein, student; Linda Laville, parent; Randy Dorn, citizen; Christy Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition; Katie Woodland, parent; Bill Woodland, student; Barbara Lawrence,

Suquamish Tribe; Marie Zackuse, Tulalip Tribal Council; Mike Felts, Suquamish Tribe; Kathleen Lopp, Washington Association for Career and Technical Education; Alton McDonald, National Acton Network; Ben Kodama, Equitable Opportunities Caucus.

CON: Paula Quin, Principal, Lydia Hawk Elementary; Colleen Nelson, Principal, Northwood Middle School; Arcella Hall, Principal, Grandview High School; Rosemary Brester, Hobart Machined Products; Mellani Hughes McAleen, Association of Washington Business; Marc Frazer, Washington Roundtable; Nancy Atwood, AeA; Dan Steele, Washington State School District Association; Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators; Amanda Pisetzner, student; Mykela Paddock, student; George Scarola, League of Education Voters.

OTHER: Gary King, WEA.

Signed in, Unable to Testify & Submitted Written Testimony: Nancy Vernon, independent researcher; Janice Yee, Minority Executive Directors Coalition; and Nick J. Brossoit, Superintendent, Edmonds School District.

Testimony For (Ways & Means): The substitute bill is a good compromise. The Institute for Public Policy study will allow the Legislature to get additional information about the WASL and allow for more informed decision making.

Testimony Against (Ways & Means): None.

Who Testified (Ways & Means): PRO: Gary King, WEA.

House Amendment(s): The review and statistical analysis of the WASL data will be used to increase the understanding of the students who did not meet the state standard, not to profile the students. Representatives of federally recognized Washington tribes are added to the list of stakeholders that the Institute must consult with when developing the initial list of possible options, procedures, methods, and measures to be reviewed. The act is named for former Governor Booth Gardner.